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The Beauty and the Beast: Reflections About the Socio-Historical and Subcultural Context of Drag Queens and “Tunten” in Berlin

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SUMMARY. In this article, I focus on two different faces found in Berlin’s gay subculture: the Tunten and the drag queens. Both are com-

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monly seen as “male homosexual transvestites,” although many such individuals today prefer to identify themselves somewhere within a diverse transgender spectrum rather than as transvestites. Tunten and drag queens differ in their gender performativity, their self-image and their chosen role models as well as in the niches in which they have been able to establish themselves in German mainstream society. Based on ethnographic data, I argue against the widespread reductionist view that the differences between Tunten and drag queens lie primarily in style, behavior, talent and success. Nor can these differences be easily explained away as a result of subculture globalization. Instead, I show that there is a simultaneous coexistence of both a subculturally established, “traditional” local transgender culture and a more recently adopted and partly imported, new local transgender culture. The coexistence of these two urban transgender cultures also indicates the paradigm shift in German gay and youth cultures of the last decades. Thus, I will emphasize the importance of the socio-historical and subcultural processes in studying transgender cultures in Western societies. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

In certain parts of Berlin such as the former West Berlin neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Schöneberg, one may see on a sunny summer afternoon seemingly exotic people; people known as “female impersonators” from theater, cabaret and mass media are about on the town, in the street, going shopping, sitting in street cafés or coming out of the subway. Here, what dominant society construes as exotic turns into subculturally performed and lived normality. This normality, however, is not free of society’s intolerance against gender variant people. It is more a result of the fierce fights for acceptance and respect that these people started 30 years ago. If you asked these people—who are still referred to within German psycho-medical discourse as “male homosex-

ual transvestites”—about their self-identification, most of them would call themselves “Tunte” and some of them would answer “drag queen.” Most of them also refuse to consider themselves transvestites and prefer the imported term “transgender.”

At first sight this use of a German name “Tunte” or an English one “drag queen” seems to be a question of “local” versus “international” terminology for the very same people and thus could be explained by the current trend of using English labels in other languages. However, if one gets to know these people closely and observe them and their gender performativity (Butler, 1990) on stage, at parties and in daily life, if one talks to them about the two categories, you quickly realize the essential differences between the two. The differences abound: in their gender performativity; in their self-images and role models; and in the niches in which they have been able to establish themselves in German mainstream society.

Based on ethnographical data collected over the last two years, I will demonstrate that drag queens and Tuntens are indeed two different transgender subcultures, which—on a societal and historical level—are simultaneously connected with and detached from each other. This apparent contradiction can be explained when examining two different areas of change from a historical and ethnological perspective: first, the changes in gay subculture, and second, the societal changes that have taken place in Berlin since the reunification of Germany.

TRANSGENDER, GENDER DIVERSITY AND (SUB)CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION IN AN ETHNOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Transgender became a trendy label in the last decade of the 20th century, a label that is now used with different meanings within different western societies. In order to avoid the false connection that is often made between gender identity and sexual identity, the label transgendered is sometimes used by people who are otherwise known as “transsexuals.” It also serves as an umbrella term for different forms of gender variant people and is used yet differently again by others within the emerging international transgender movement and some western academic discourse as a language tool to illustrate their unease with gender-dichotomous names (Bolin, 1994; Dallas, 1998; Valentine, 2000). In Germany, and especially in Berlin, this imported term “transgender” is used by different groups ranging from those traditionally referred to as transsex-

uals and (heterosexual) transvestites to Tunten, drag queens and drag kings or self-defined androgynous people. A dozen of these transgender groups are united in a network: the Transgender Network Berlin. Following this emic discourse and using transgender as an umbrella term, it seems therefore appropriate to speak of transgender subcultures or transgender cultures in the case of drag queens and Tunten in Berlin.

With the emerging transgender discourse grew a new scholarly interest in the gender diversity of nonwestern societies. Researchers have shown that gender variant or transgender persons as individuals, as social groups or as their own gender (category) are a widespread phenomenon in our world (see Bleibtreu-Ehrenberg, 1984; Herdt, 1994a; Balzer, 2001). In focusing on the emic perspective of indigenous cultures, anthropologists redefined phenomena such as the “berdache,” no longer using such ethnocentric terms as “indigenous transvestitism” or “indigenous homosexuality” and moving on to discuss the concept of a third and, in some cases, a fourth gender, pointing out the gender diversity of such cultures (Roscoe, 1998). While the gender ambivalence of a third gender in those societies is often recognized with respect and honor and can lead to an important role and function for the entire society (Herdt, 1994b; Nanda, 1994; Mageo, 1996; Roscoe, 1998), transgender people in western (and westernized) societies are still primarily explained by psychological and medical discourses and are marginalized in the broader society (Lindemann, 1993; Bolin, 1994; Kulick, 1998; Valentine, 2000).¹

Gender identities, as cultural entities, are not fixed, but rather flexible and influenced by cultural changes. These changes can be cultural changes within the society or influences from the outside. The best-known influences in ethnographic scholarship are found in colonialism and missionary work (Herdt, 1994b). In Thailand, for example, the influence of the western gay movement has had its impact on the local transgender culture in urban contexts. The local third gender “kathoei,” which still exists in rural contexts, is now referred to as lady boy and tom boy in urban contexts (Jackson and Sullivan, 1999). Some “kathoeis” in Bangkok also call themselves drag queens (Brummelhuis, 1999, p. 123) and thus seem to be influenced by concepts of western gay culture.

In Samoa, where the local third gender “fa’afafine” is associated with the traditional Samoan theater, recent researchers report that in urban settings young “fa’afafine” now call themselves drag queens and perform in trendy Discotheques (Mageo, 1996, p. 601). The increase of drag queens as an identifiable and identified set of individuals in urban centers in the last decade has also been found in South America (e.g.,

Argentina, Brazil, Columbia), Asia (e.g., Japan, South Korea, Thailand) and some European countries.² Against the backdrop of the international media spotlight and the commercialization of drag queens in the mid-1990s, this might appear to stem from the processes of cultural globalization described as Westernization, Americanization or “McWorld Culture” (Berger, 1997, p. 26) or more specifically as “internationalization of postmodern gay identities” (Altman, 1996, p. 77) or “globalization of sexual identities” and “McDonaldizing of sexual minorities” (Bell and Binnie, 2000, pp. 5 & 116). Some scholars, however, argue that such general theories often lack detailed ethnographic information and a deeper knowledge of the local contexts and thus are underestimating the local (Cvetkovich and Kellner, 1997; Roberts, 2001).

While doing fieldwork on transgender subcultures in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) I observed the coexistence of the local “traditional” transgender subculture of “travestis”/“transformistas” and the recently emerged, western-influenced transgender subculture of drag queens. I had already noticed a very similar kind of coexistence between the Tuntten and drag queens during my fieldwork on transgender subcultures in Berlin. With the latter example, I will present more in-depth detailed ethnographic information in a local context in order to demonstrate a form of local transgender autochthony as part of a global transgender diversity.

From the dozens of transgender people I came to know closely during my two years of fieldwork in Berlin, I selected eight drag queens and eight Tuntten,³ whom I interviewed in detail about being a drag queen or being a Tunte. This ethnographical data is supplemented by participant observation in both the local community and in the interviewees’ daily lives, by many informal talks as well as the analysis of historical documents (videos, flyers, underground publications, etc.) and current publications (gay magazines, weekly magazines, tabloid newspapers).

In considering the coexistence of these two transgender subcultures as a social phenomenon from an ethnological perspective—similar to the examples mentioned above (e.g., Herdt, 1994a; Mageo, 1996; Roscoe, 1998; Kulick, 1998; Valentine, 2000)—I concentrate on the emic perspective, meaning the self-images of these people. Thus, I emphasize the societal and subcultural aspects, instead of individual- and family-based aspects, and the social interaction in daily life, instead of solely stage performances and performing. Consequently, I include in my analysis the context of cultural changes (within Berlin society) and

influences from outside (media popularity and success of New York drag queens).

THE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Drag queens and Tunten are self-chosen labels for people who are often otherwise referred to as “male homosexual transvestites.” At first glance, the protagonists of the two groups might look like Beauty and the Beast. In Berlin’s gay community, they are often distinguished further as “Glamour Queens” and “Trash Tunten” (Trümmer-Tunten) because of their different gender performativity and appearance (Van Blond, 1999). Tunten, who tend to dress in a somewhat trashy and sometimes in a theatrical or *grotesque* way, use their gender performativity as a means of political protest/statement and to distinguish themselves from the German mainstream female impersonation (travesty). They see their gender performativity as an expression of their inner femaleness as well as a criticism of a certain mainstream model of femininity. What Tunten want and fight for in drag is acceptance and respect from the mainstream for their different way of life and for alternative lifestyles. Tunten have resignified a label used outside of the community as a slur term associated with “soft men,” “feminine men” or “men in women’s clothes” to a *nom de guerre* in a political sense.

Mireille,⁴ a forty-year-old Tunten activist and artist who was socialized as a Tunte in the 1980s, explains:

Tunte was an abusive term formerly used by the heterosexuals, but we appropriated this term and transformed it in an offensive way for our own political purposes as leftist gay people.

Yvonne, a twenty-five-year-old Tunte who came out in the late 1990s, confirms this political attitude for the younger Tunten generation by saying that:

A Tunte is not simply wearing drag: it’s the political attitude and activity that makes you a Tunte.

This political attitude is primarily seen in the context of gay activism against discrimination and for acceptance of gay people and their lifestyles. Tunten are also engaged in social work in the areas of AIDS prevention and care. A few remain, like many in the 1980s, activists in the

leftist counterculture. The Berlin Tunten may be compared best with the New York-East Village drag queens of the 1980s, where Drag was described as a fierce and wild thing (Fleisher, 1996, p. 40) and such contemporary New York drag queens as Flloyd, Lavinia or Hattie Hathaway would fit perfectly into the Berlin Tunten scene. Tunten can also be categorized as what Steven Schacht (2002) termed “professional camp queens” (p. 171), with the added difference of a specific political attitude and subcultural context.

Most drag queens, on the other hand, tend to look more for applause, confirmation and money when they perform at parties and on stage. They want to be integrated in the media mainstream—preferably as celebrated superstars or as admired divas. Due to these goals, beauty and perfection in their appearance and their gender performativity as well as a certain noble attitude have become an important factor for them. Explains Sunny, a 23-year-old German drag queen, “being a Diva means that you’re allowed to be arrogant, because you know that you are better than the masses!” Whitney, an American drag queen who came to Berlin in the late 1990s, talks about the process of becoming a drag queen: “You become a drag queen when you start to do your makeup better.” Berlin drag queens dress generally in a more glamorous way, look like the success-oriented and commercialized American drag queens of the 1990s, such as the US drag icon RuPaul, and could be compared with those Steven Schacht (2002) has termed “professional glamour queens” (p. 169).

While some of the drag queens look down upon Tunten for their look and their societally critical performances, many Tunten saw in the newly emerging drag queen scene the same essence of illusion and conformity against which they had revolted in the 1980s, when they dissociated themselves from the German travesty performers. This distinction becomes even clearer in drag shows. Drag queens generally impersonate on stage famous international superstars like Marilyn Monroe, Kylie Minogue, Madonna or Marlene Dietrich, but they do so exclusively for entertainment value. Tunten, on the other hand, portray on stage the woman next door: the cashier girl in the supermarket, the dumb daughter of a right-wing politician, the old woman in the restroom, and often just themselves. Thus, they combine an intrinsic (self-)parody with a twofold societal criticism, a criticism of the heterosexual and male dominated majority and its clichés and of the genre travesty itself.

Members of both groups, however, state, that their drag is not simply “female impersonation,” but moreover an expression of their female side and partly their gender identity. Only a few individuals of both

groups reported that they once took female hormones or are still taking female hormones or are thinking about taking female hormones in the future. While the majority of the Tunten are called by their female names in daily life within their community, very rarely was this observed among the Berlin drag queens. Another main difference can be observed in the self-organization in the niches they occupy in mainstream society: while Tunten tend to organize collectively within their community (e.g., in ensembles, and political groups) drag queens tend to be loners trying to start solo careers in the mainstream business.

As I will further demonstrate, the different appearance and gender performativity of drag queens and Tunten onstage and offstage—the conforming and entertaining perfection of the “Beauty” in contrast to the rebellious and critical *grotesqueness* of the “Beast”—is not merely a matter of talent and physical appearance, but of different lifestyles and attitudes existing in the contemporary gay scene of new metropolitan Berlin. Considering the academic debate of whether transgender and drag are subversive (Butler, 1990; Schacht, 2002), drag queens in Berlin might appear as “gender conservatives” and Tunten as “gender anarchists” based on these lifestyles and attitudes. In a socio-historic and subcultural perspective, these significant differences go even further. For a better understanding of these different lifestyles and attitudes, it is necessary to bring into focus the beginnings of the self-organization and emergence of the Tunten-culture in West Berlin in the 1970s and 1980s, which laid the foundation for the drag queen vogue of the new and changing Berlin of the 1990s.⁵

THE HOMOSEXUAL CAMPAIGN WEST BERLIN AND THE CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, West Berlin gained a reputation as a fertile ground for all kinds of alternative subcultures, underground and counterculture movements. The student revolt of the late 1960s that started in West Berlin became famous as the “Out-of-Parliament-Opposition” and as the 1968 Generation throughout all of West Germany. The recent German gay movement dates back to the rebel years of the student revolt in West Berlin as well.

In 1971 fifty young gay men, many of whom were students, founded the Homosexual Campaign West Berlin/Homosexuelle Aktion West-Berlin (HAW) in the social climate of the student revolt and the Out-of-Parliament-Opposition. One year later, the HAW counted 160

members and established the first gay center in West Berlin. When in 1973 gay men from Italy and France marched in drag to a gay demonstration in West Berlin, the so-called “Tunten-Streit” (Tunten-Debate) arose in the HAW. In heated political discussions, it was discussed whether drag, such a “scandalous appearance,” could be considered emancipating or not. The conservative part of the HAW separated and joined a more moderate gay group, whereas those who stayed followed the idea of a “feminist revolution” and started to use drag as a political means. In the late 1970s, the HAW blossomed into a dozen gay projects (e.g., gay bookstores, gay magazines, gay bars, gay publishing house) and their center was called the SchwuZ: Schwulen-Zentrum or gay men’s center) (Frings & Kraushaar, 1982, pp. 329). In the early 1980s gay men who defined themselves as Tunten dominated the SchwuZ and so it soon became the home of the emerging Tunte-culture. As Mireille, who came out as a Tunte in SchwuZ in the early 1980s, explains, “The SchwuZ was a germ-cell for the Tunte-culture during the 1980s. Many young Tunten came out in SchwuZ and learned from the elders how to become a Tunte.”

Whereas the HAW-Tunten of the 1970s used drag mainly at demonstrations and for political reasons, the SchwuZ-Tunten of the 1980s followed that young tradition, but they also added elements of fun and performance to their politics. The SchwuZ-Tunten organized themselves not only in loose political groups, but also in artistic ensembles, which combined politics with having fun and performance with (self-)parody and societal reflection. The performances of the Tunte-Ensemble “Bermudaas” in 1983 and 1984, for example, were a criticism of the mainstream Travesty-Shows, the performed illusion for a well-paying heterosexual audience (Bermudaas, 1985). Elfriede, a fifty-year-old Tunte and former member of the “Bermudaas,” summarizes the fundamental criticism that Tunten direct towards travesty performers, saying that pulling off the wig on stage after the show is simply a “mortal sin” for a Tunte. She adds that for Tunten in the 1980s, you were a kind of misfit if you wore nylons *without* runs. The “Bermudaas,” who usually performed for free, also talked about political issues and social problems (like AIDS) in their shows. The SchwuZ-Tunten had connections to the counterculture movement as well and some of them lived in a squatted house, which became well known as the “Tunten-Haus” (Tunten-House) (Bashore, 1990).

As a result and a means of their political tradition and activities—which claimed “the personal is the political”—drag was not only presented in nightlife and on stage by the performing artists, but also

during the day and by nonperformers. Thus, the subculturally constructed gender identity of Tunten was also based on a political attitude. This attitude was rooted not only in a political gay activism, but also in the counterculture movement of the left.

The West Berlin Tunten-culture of the 1980s had its heyday in the late 1980s, when a Tunten-Ensemble called “Ladies Neid” (Ladies Envy) performed with 30 Tunten on stage. At that time the SchwuZ-Tunten organized AIDS benefit concerts, founded the first mobile AIDS-homecare service and the first gay and lesbian artists’ agency. At that time, the SchwuZ-Tunten saw their community as a family.⁶

***A NEW BERLIN IN THE 1990s:
THE REMAINS OF THE TUNTEN CULTURE MEET
THE DRAG QUEEN HYPE***

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the ensuing euphoria in the very first years after the reunification of Germany, the public opinion about foreigners and other minorities who were not “good Germans” changed. In the beginning of the 1990s, the Tunten community was, like other minorities and alternative subcultures in Berlin, confronted with an increase in discrimination and violence as well as the other major changes in the city. This was due not only to the patriotic *zeitgeist*, but also to other societal changes that took place in “New Berlin.” All of a sudden, West Berlin was not an isolated island anymore, and together with East Berlin, was about to become the new capital of Germany. In the years after the reunification, the hunger for freedom and for consumption on the part of the East Berliners coincided with both a migration of young people from all parts of Germany, the fun-and-consumption-oriented young people, the “1989 Generation” as they were later named, as well as the move of wealthy West German businessmen to Berlin. Thus, the “New Berlin” became not only the symbol of the reunification and the end of the Cold War, but also a fertile ground for investors, businesspeople and young “party people.” Sociologists diagnosed a significant paradigm shift in the German youth culture from the more collective and political “1968 Generation” to the heterogeneous, individualistic and more fun-and-consumption-oriented “1989 Generation” that emerged in the “New Berlin” (Leggewie, 1995).

The best example for the significant and fast societal change shifting West Berlin from the island of alternative and political subcultures to

the new metropolitan Berlin was the “Love Parade.” While in the summer of 1989, a hundred people were partying in the streets of West Berlin as a demonstration for peace and happiness (thus inventing the “Love Parade”), in the mid-1990s this fast-growing and already copyrighted commercial event became Berlin’s main tourist attraction, drawing more than a million people from all of the European countries and from other parts of the world. At the same time, similar developments could be observed in Berlin’s gay scene. Christopher Street Day, Berlin’s annual parade commemorating the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969, changed from a political demonstration in the 1980s to a partly commercialized Gay Parade along the same lines as the (heterosexually dominated) “Love Parade” in the 1990s.⁷ Thus, in the mid-1990s, interconnected developments were identifiable: an increasing of acceptance of gay people by the broader society and at the same time an increased tendency to conform to the “heterosexual society” by major parts of the gay community (Hinzpeter, 1997, p. 160).

Moreover, the new patriotic *zeitgeist* mixed with the desire for consumption and commerce led to a marginalization of the alternative and political subcultures and of the Tunten culture of the former West Berlin. The response of the gay community can be seen as a reflection of the shifts that have taken place in the society as a whole. When the gay community started to adopt and to influence the new lifestyle of the party scene in Berlin, the Tunten culture, which once played an important role in the gay movement, was marginalized in the gay subculture. In the middle of these changes, drag queens appeared on the Berlin gay scene and symbolically would become the new vogue.

Despite the fact that there had been only a few people with the attitudes and gender performativity of contemporary German drag queens before, the name “drag queen” as a self-selected label became popular among German drag queens in the mid-1990s. Angelique, a forty-year-old drag queen, who had always been an outsider among the SchwuZ-Tunten of the late 1980s because of her glamorous style and manner (and thus always refused to see herself as a Tunte), did not start to call herself a drag queen until the mid-1990s, when popular drag queen movies, the success of the self-proclaimed “supermodel of the world” RuPaul (RuPaul, 1995) and the media coverage about New York drag queens supported and influenced the new Berlin drag queens.

Both as a result of the gay activism and the fights for respect and visibility by Tunten during the 1980s and due to their own perfection in appearance and performance, drag queens were accepted right from the start on the “New Berlin” party scene, into which they fit better than

Tunten ever did. Soon they were appearing on the cover of gay magazines and the first real Berlin drag queen star, Biggy van Blond, got her own locally broadcast TV talk show and her own column in a nationwide tabloid newspaper. Unlike the Berlin Tunten, the Berlin drag queens had had no collective organizational framework. They knew each other from parties and events, but worked mostly in solo shows and performances or as waitresses in the Techno- and House-music scene. With this fast success, many of them separated themselves from the still existent remains of the Tunten culture, and as a further reflection of the broader society, the competition among them was high and the solidarity low. Explains the drag queen Angelique, who attended the New York Wigstock festival in 1994 and who had the idea to organize a Berlin Wigstock called “Wigstöckel,”⁸

In the mid-1990s everybody knew each other from seeing and purposely ignoring one another and the community was very splintered. It was an unbearable condition.

TRANSGENDER UNITED: DRAG QUEENS AND TUNTEN DIVIDED

The first Wigstöckel took place in 1996 under the theme “Drag Queens United.” The event was organized with the intention to overcome the differences between the individuals of the scattered Tunten and drag queen scenes and to gather the different drag performers in a single show. Thus, more than 400 people in drag attended the first “Wigstöckel.” Because of internal disputes in the organizational team of Wigstöckel in the earliest stages and the development of a more political character for Wigstöckel, some of the Berlin drag queens, like Angelique, withdrew from the organization as well as from participating in the show.⁹ Today, the Wigstöckel cast is a team of Tunten, drag kings, cross-dressers and transsexual people, who all perform under the heading “Wigstöckel Transgender United.”

Wigstöckel was only one attempt to reunite the splintered scene. Another attempt was the Tunten-Ensemble “Café Transler”: a political performance group in the tradition of the 1980s Tunten-culture. “Café Transler” started “open stage” nights, which served as a means to support young drag performers during their first steps on stage. This opportunity was and still is used by Tunten as well as by young drag queens (and recently also by drag kings). Supported and promoted by Café

Transler and its open stage, in the late 1990s three young Tunten joined and created a new Trash-Tunten-Ensemble: the “Albrecht Diseusen” (AIDis). The AIDis gained a reputation for reviving an almost extinct tradition of Tunten-Trash as performed by the Bermudaas in the early 1980s. The members of both Café Transler and the AIDis are politically active within the gay community. This activism is reflected in their shows in a form of societal criticism. In performing as supermarket cashier girls on stage, the AIDis also follow the 1980s Tunten tradition using a *grotesque* and unglamorous form of drag to demonstrate their nonconformity and to parody female impersonation.

At the same time, in the late 1990s, some of the Berlin drag queens who had withdrawn from Wigstöckel founded for their own purposes “Superstar Management,” an agency that promotes drag queens and so-called club kids for model agencies and mainstream party events and as solo performers. With their contrary motifs, the drag queen agency Superstar Management and the Tunten-Ensemble AIDis displayed once again the significant differences in Berlin between the Beauty and the Beast, the drag queens and Tunten.

URBAN TRANSGENDER CULTURES IN CONTEXT: THE BEAUTY AND THE BEAST REVISED

As I have shown, the emergence of a drag queen culture in Berlin reflects not only a change in the lifestyle in large parts of the gay scene, but also the dramatic changes that took place in the city during the consolidation of Berlin as the metropolitan capital of a reunified Germany; i.e., the transition from being the center of West Germany’s counterculture movement to becoming the center of Germany’s Techno and Party movement. While Tunten in the past and still today organize themselves in the socially and politically active parts of the gay subculture, the drag queens not only conquered the gay party scene as solo performers, but also achieved access to parts of the mainstream business (advertisement, TV, heterosexual club scene). Apart from the first Wigstöckel festivals and the agency Superstar Management, drag queens made no efforts to organize themselves and preferred to start solo careers. For most of the Tunten their gender performativity not only is an expression of their inner femaleness, but also serves as a way of making a socially critical political statement.

In contrast, for most of the drag queens, their gender performativity is (beyond being an expression of their inner femaleness) a successful

means to make their names as performers. As Wigstöckel became better known as a political transgender event, the drag queens withdrew and established themselves in a more well-defined “market,” one more specifically made for drag queens, which was a recent development. As I previously noted, the Berlin drag queen of today has a strong focus on appearance and performance, largely conforms to societal expectations, and also a certain noble attitude. This noble attitude—which is sometimes also expressed in a form of arrogance towards both Tunten and people in general—stands in direct contrast to the egalitarian attitude of the Tunten.

The Berlin drag queens have been influenced by the media hype about New York drag queens right from the start. Here it is very important to understand that the media most promote drag queens like RuPaul, self-proclaimed supermodel of the world, and not drag queens like her longtime friend, the shocking performer Flloyd. Moreover, the immense diversity of contemporary New York drag queens is often forgotten due to the limiting stereotypes of the media (Fleisher, 1996, p. 39). Politically active and nonconforming drag queens are not part of the mainstream hype, nor do they serve as a role model for the Berlin drag queens. This is due less to a lack of knowledge than to a conscious selection. The new vogue of drag queens in Berlin coincides nicely with the current German *zeitgeist*, which also helped to shape the way that certain international drag queens are selected as role models. Hence, the rich internal diversity of a drag queen community like the one in New York is contrasted by the present drag queen-Tunten antagonism in the transgender subculture of Berlin.

The antagonism of Tunten and drag queens in Berlin is best revealed in the polarity of an ensemble like the AIDis and an agency like Superstar Management, both groups that were founded by young gay people who came out in the 1990s. They can be seen as representatives not only of two faces of the contemporary gay community, but also of two different and coexisting urban transgender subcultures. The Tunten still belong to and carry on certain “old” traditions of the counterculture movement of 1980s West Berlin. They are keeping alive a tradition that emerged in a very specific socio-historic and also subcultural context. Insofar the contemporary Berlin Tunten culture can be seen as a “traditional” local transgender subculture.

On the other hand, the Berlin drag queens are not simply copying the drag queen scene of New York. They correspond well with the new German youth culture as well as to the changes in the contemporary Berlin gay scene and thus they pick out their international role models

like RuPaul in a very selective way. The new drag queen vogue of Berlin must be seen, like the Tunten culture, in the socio-historical context in which it emerged and thus represents a new local transgender subculture. In the same way drag queens in Berlin are not simply an imported trend from the U.S., but a reflection of a significant change in German youth and gay culture, the contemporary Tunten-culture of Berlin is a reflection of a now only marginally existing German youth and gay culture that dates back to the 1970s and 1980s.

This example of two different and coexisting transgender subcultures—like the case of “travestis” and drag queens in Rio de Janeiro and other ethnographical exemplifications sketched out early on—demonstrates the importance of emphasizing the socio-historical and subcultural contexts of urban transgender cultures in order to understand their different self-images, gender performances, and cultures. The simultaneous coexistence of two transgender subcultures, the Tunten and the drag queens in Berlin, exemplifies a local urban transgender autochthony, which is also part of global transgender diversity. As such, it is only partly influenced by and is not primarily the simple results of developments of subculture globalization, which are discussed in terms of internationalization of gay identities.

NOTES

1. That some transgender persons in western and westernized societies have become famous as performers, singers and/or models (e.g., RuPaul, Romy Haag, Roberta Close) is due to their talent, beauty and/or ability to fulfill certain expectations of a mainstream audience and not to their gender identity.

2. As I learned from Asian and Latin-American drag queens I met in Berlin, Rio de Janeiro and New York. See also Brubach & O'Brien, 1999.

3. They are between 23 and 50 years old and mostly of German descent, but also of Afro- and Latin-American and Asian descent.

4. Mireille is, like all other informant names used in this article, a pseudonym created by me and not the self-chosen female Tunten name under which Mireille is known in Berlin. I use this method to provide more anonymity, because in the Berlin transgender subculture some people like Mireille have their artist names written in their ID cards and even use them to sign checks, tenancy agreements, etc.

5. Transgender people existed also in East Berlin and East Germany, but apart from outsiders like the well-known Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, they lived mostly clandestinely and there was no self-organization and subculture as in the West (Brubach & O'Brien, 1999, p. 25).

6. In 1988, the photographer Jürgen Baldiga published a photo book with portraits of 26 Berlin Tunten, which was seen by the protagonists as their family album (Baldiga, 1988).

7. In 1996, the Christopher Street Day Parade was celebrated by 50,000 people partying in the street and sponsored by the tobacco industry (Hinzpeter, 1997, p. 140).

8. "Stöckel" is the German term for high heels.

9. For example, at Wigstöckel 2002 the Gaysha-Boys from Kyoto (Japan) and Sherry Vine from New York City were the only self-identified drag queens performing.

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